



**LEADERSHIP**

# Mastering organizational change

## *Steps to get your team to buy in*

Change is woven into the fabric of today's business landscape. Years ago, it was the next BIG thing; today, it's the constant next thing.

As such, both executives and managers must understand how to effectively lead and manage change. Change initiatives that are poorly thought through, rolled out too fast or implemented without adequate preparation can lead to employee frustration, cynicism, disengagement and turnover.

Too often, leaders interpret the emotions that result after announcing a change initiative as resistance, when in fact employees are struggling to understand what exactly they are expected to do and why.

In most situations, when given an opportunity, employees closest to the change can provide insights and ideas that will result in a smoother, easier change process.

To facilitate a smooth change process, follow these five principles:

### **1. Leverage culture**

Understand how people think, behave and work together. Focus on the elements that will support a successful change initiative to gain early buy-in and momentum.

Explain what needs to be modified to create better alignment with the new way of operating. Describe how things operate now and what the future can be. This gives people a 3D view of the desired future so they can support a better tomorrow.

### **2. Secure input at all levels**

Change should be a collaborative process. Invite team members to the conversation from the

onset - early enough so they can participate in defining the change itself.

While change is often initiated at the top, implementation typically happens at the mid- and frontline levels. Include personnel from each level as part of the design process. Potential roadblocks and hurdles can be identified and plans put in place to resolve them.

Serve as the facilitator, or hire someone who will gather the ideas, help people process and prioritize, and review the consequences and risks of each option. Then, decide on the course of action.

Enlisting the hearts and minds of team members through inclusion and participation enhances people's self-worth and overall engagement.

### **3. Explain the 'why'**

Leaders can inspire people, but for them to commit, they need to buy in for their own reasons. This means that you may need to "slow down to go fast." Take time to frame "why" the change is needed. Describe the value and desired outcomes of the change initiative, as well as the consequences of doing nothing.

When people have a compelling "why," an emotional shift happens that is palatable and sustaining. It's the difference between saying, "The company needs to make this change so we can grow at 15 percent a year for the next five years," or "These changes will allow us to create a significant differential between us and the competition. When clients understand how we can contribute to their business success, the conversation shifts from a focus on product features and price, to output and profit. Illustrating how we simplify their business processes, shrink their lead time and generate more output demonstrates quantifiable value and return on investment."

### **4. Set realistic expectations and be accountable**

At first, change isn't easy because people are adjusting to the new way of working. Communicating clear, realistic, and measurable expectations helps people feel empowered to take action.

Stay close to your team, answer employees' questions, debrief their experiences and strategize their action plans so they're on target with the corporate plan. It's not uncommon for people to initially engage, and then feel the weight of having to "learn so many new things" that they become overwhelmed. Be understanding. Provide encour-

agement. Let them know that together, you will all get through the challenges that arise with change.

### **5. Assess and adapt**

People want to make a meaningful difference and do the right thing. Knowing what options are available and how to decipher the best from the worst can sometimes be difficult for frontline people. Your assistance to help them work through the possibilities, as well as the struggles, of retooling and recalibrating provides much-needed support and understanding.

For team members who were successful under the old system, they may now feel vulnerable about being equalized with others and retreat, wanting to preserve the "old way of doing things."

Acknowledge the difficulty. Be encouraging. Communicate how confident you are in each individual's ability to succeed. Highlight how they effectively handled other change initiatives in the past and draw a correlation between how they handled these situations and the challenges they are now facing. Stay close but don't interfere or overreact. Instead, ask questions that help people learn and grow.

Change requires that we abandon what we know for the promise of a better future. This can feel risky or even frightening for people. It is our responsibility as leaders to engage team members and help them find the courage to move forward by working together and testing new ways of operating. The journey is sometimes as valuable as the outcome. ■



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